FACTS AND FICTIONS ABOUT "GOD SAVE THE KING"

By J. A. FULLER-MAITLAND

IT is not a little curious that the nation which held for so long the supreme position in the musical world should never yet have succeeded in creating a national anthem of its own. Germany subsisted for many years on an adaptation from the English "God save the King," and later she adopted, as "Deutschland über Alles," the Austrian Hymn which Haydn either composed or took from a Croatian source. The Franco-Prussian war of 1870 produced nothing of greater moment on either side than some patriotic songs of very moderate artistic value, belonging in fact to the same class as our "Red, White, and Blue" or the "Jingo" ditty which supplied a nickname for the patriotic party in England in the days when patriotism was out of fashion. Such compositions, like "Partant pour la Syrie," could only be called national songs by a stretch of terms. So great was Germany's reputation in music that the absurd claim of a German origin for our own national anthem was believed by large numbers of amateurs in England, who in those days thought nothing good in music had ever been produced in England. In Germany itself, of course, many people grew up naïvely regarding the English tune as their own; and there is a story of a German cook, engaged by Sir Charles Hallé, who, on the morning after her arrival in London, appeared with her eyes full of tears, saying that she had heard a street band playing her own national anthem as a pretty compliment to herself. Unfortunately for the German claim, as we shall see later on, the original adapter of the song had the grace to acknowledge the truth in his title-page.

We may dismiss the very weak claim advanced on behalf of a French origin in 1834, in the fictitious *Souvenirs de la Marquise de Créqui, 1710 à 1800*, in which it was implied that Lully wrote the tune and that it was appropriated by Dr. John Bull, "organist of St. Paul's." As Lully was born five years after the death of Bull, this charge of appropriation cannot be established. The attribution of the air to Bull (who, by the way, was never organist of St. Paul's), rests on curiously insecure foundations; there exists

indeed a composition by him with the name "God save the King," but unfortunately it has no sort of resemblance to the tune we have. But, oddly enough, in the MS. in which this appears, there is an "Ayre" which does bear some structural likeness to the well-known tune, though Richard Clark, at one time owner of the MS., is accused of having tampered with the composition by adding sharps, etc. to increase the similarity. In *Melismata*, a collection of vocal pieces published in 1611, there is a "carol" to the words "Remember, O thou man" which, though in the minor mode, is sufficiently like our tune to warrant some of the authorities in surmising that it is its original guise. There is also a "largo" movement in the sixth of Purcell's twelve *Sonatas of Three Parts* (1683), which has some slight resemblance, but not enough to support the claim that was formerly made on Purcell's behalf. All these theories, as well as some others even less strongly supported, are fully discussed in the late Dr. W. H. Cummings's interesting little book on the subject, to which the reader must be referred for details.

Hitherto we have been dealing with conjecture only; we begin to find some foothold shortly before the middle of the 18th. century. It has been long accepted as a fact that Henry Carey sang the song in 1740 at a dinner given at a tavern in Cornhill to celebrate Admiral Vernon's victory at Portobello. But the story rests on the information of a Mr. Townsend, who told a Mr. Ashley, who told a Mr. Bowles, that Townsend's father had been at the meeting in question and said that Carey then announced the song to be his own composition. There is not very firm ground as yet, nor does the appearance of the song in print give us a very definite date, since the first edition of first volume of Simpson's *Thesaurus Musicus* is assigned to the date [1743?] in the British Museum catalogue, and to 1740 by Dr. Cummings. It is odd that neither here, nor in any of the other of the early printed versions, does the name of Henry Carey occur as author, and in the case of a song which was obviously popular and well-known this is almost complete evidence that he did not compose it.[1]

[1]The most noteworthy champion of Carey's authorship is Friedrich Chrysander in his monograph on Henry Carey in the "Jahrbücher für musikalische Wissenschaft," 1863. In this essay, known of course to Mr. Maitland but unknown to the average student of the subject, Chrysander argues against dating the Portobello incident 1740 and he reaches the conclusion *via* the bibliographical method that the two volumes of "Thesaurus Musicus" must have been issued in 1744 and 1746. Whatever the merits of this theory may be, it has not yet come to be generally accepted. Without wishing to violate editorial proprieties, I may be permitted to add my personal opinion that the late Dr. Cummings was not always at his best when assigning bibliographical dates. —*Ed.*

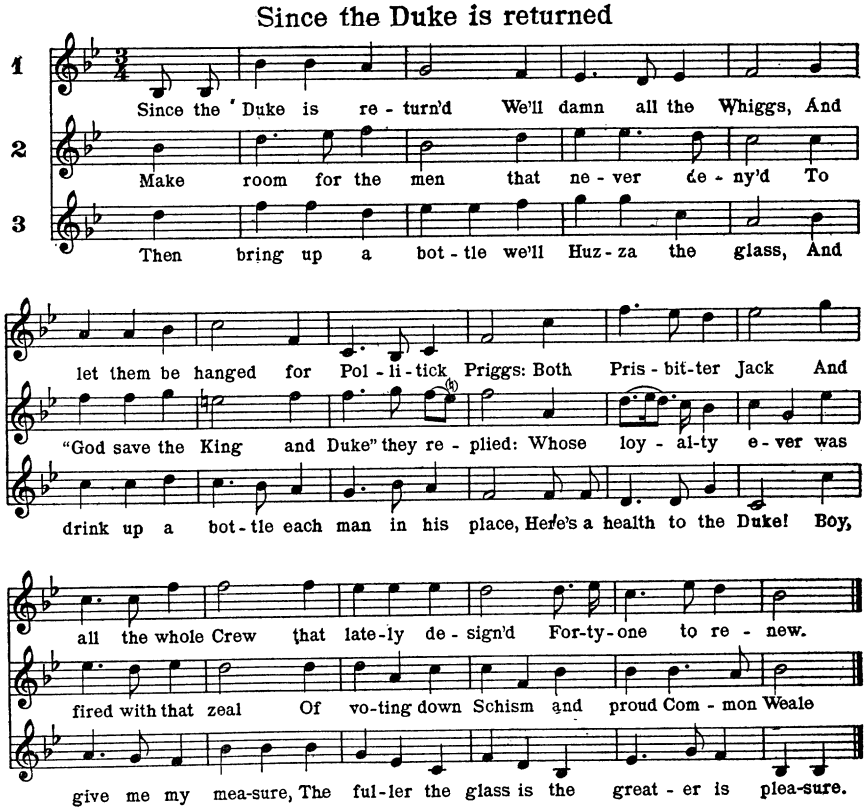
We only reach the first definite and unassailable fact in 1745, when there is a record of performances of the song at the two patent theatres, Drury Lane and Covent Garden, arranged for the two houses by Dr. Arne and his pupil Dr. Burney respectively. In the same year it was republished in the *Gentleman's Magazine* as well as in the second edition of *Thesaurus Musicus*, where the words "sung at the Theatres Royal" imply that the book cannot have been published before the last quarter of the year, since Sept. 28 is the earliest date for the performance of the song at Drury Lane, when the occasion was a celebration of the successful putting-down of the Stuart rising. The version in the second edition of this last-named collection differs slightly from that in the first, where the first bar of the air consists of three repetitions of the key-note, G, and the accompanying bass shows that it is not a misprint but intentional. This earliest printed version will be found in Dr. Cummings's book, and in Grove's *Dictionary*, art. "God save the King," where the first edition of *Thesaurus Musicus* is wrongly entitled *Harmonia Anglicana*, an error due to Chappell's *Popular Music of the Olden Time*. In the new edition of Grove, it is suggested that James Oswald, a Scottish musician employed by Simpson, may have been the adapter, or even the composer, of the tune; and this theory is supported by the occurrence of a tune named "Osweld's Are" among the tunes played by the chimes of Windsor Parish Church. There is, however, no positive evidence to prove that "Osweld's Are" was identical with "God save the King," and the suggestion must, I fear, be dismissed like so many other attractive theories.

The first continental appearance of the tune was in 1763, when a collection was published at The Hague under the title of *La Lire Maçonne*. The tune appears as "D'Ongeveinsdheid" and acknowledgment is made that it is the air of the English "God save the King." Denmark appears to have been the first foreign country to appropriate the song as a national hymn, but there the adapter, one Harries, prefixed to his version "Heil dir dem Liebenden," published in the *Flensburger Wochenblatt* of Jan. 27, 1790, the statement that the words were written for the melody of "God save great George our King". In the *Spenersche Zeitung* of Berlin, for Dec. 17, 1793, the well-known form, beginning "Heil dir im Siegerkranz" appeared; it was written by B. G. Schumacher, and soon became the national anthem not only of Prussia but of various other German states.

Among the composers who have made use of the tune are Beethoven, Weber, and Brahms, of whom the first named put on

record his knowledge of the original nationality of the song, in the words "I must show the English what a blessing they have in their 'God save the King.'" (Nohl, *Beethoven-Feier.*) Weber ("Jubelouvertüre") and Brahms ("Trumphlied") both ignore the English origin of the tune. Among the many adaptations or arrangements of the tune, there is a very odd piece in the form of a "Fest-Praeludium" by Paul Janssen, a professor in the Dresden Conservatorium; it is for two players on one organ, using their four hands and four feet; it is described on the title-page as "mit Benutzung der sächsischen Königshymne 'Den König segne Gott.'"

Quite lately, while helping to prepare the catches of Henry Purcell for publication by the Purcell Society, I came across the following, which appears on p. 76 of a MS in the British Museum



(Add. MSS. 19,759), a collection of songs, etc., which was in the possession of one Charles Campelman on June 9, 1681. The

music is written out on one continuous line, and is headed "A Catch for 4 voices." It is obviously for three, not four, and is rather what is now called a "round" than a catch proper.

The political allusions, even apart from the fact that the date is pretty nearly fixed by the owner's inscription, are clearly to be understood as pointing to the Duke of York's return from virtual exile in 1680. In that year there was a strong reaction in favour of the "Tories," (our two political nicknames were first used about the same year), and though "prisbitter Jack" is not easy to identify, the name undoubtedly stands for the type of nonconformists who wished to bring back the state of things which started in 1641. The interest of the composition lies in its fifth complete bar, where the second voice has the words "God save the King" referred to as if they formed part of a toast, and associated with four notes that are exactly identical with those of the opening of our national anthem. Observe that here is no mere textual identity of notes in an inner part, but the second voice, which sings the phrase, is the topmost part for the moment, while the harmonies in the other parts are virtually the same as what we have.

It remains to be seen what these four notes can be held to prove. It is clear that the combination of any given four notes with well-known words afterwards identified with them may be purely fortuitous, but a very little reflection will show how very great the odds are against such a combination. The first note has of course no chance against it, as every tune must begin somewhere; as to the second note, it is evident that, taking only the diatonic scale, there are seven chances to one against any given note; with each successive step in the phrase the adverse chances increase so rapidly that it has been calculated that there are practically 63 chances to 1 against the first three notes being what they are, and 511 to 1 against the phrase of four notes being what it is.

In favour of the intentional use of the notes by Purcell, as a quotation from a well-known tune, the following points may be recapitulated:—

1. The notes of the tune are in the uppermost part for the moment.
2. The harmonies agree with those of the earliest version which gives the accepted form of the melody.

The difference in the first edition of *Thesaurus Musicus* is quite possibly due to careless transcription of the tune, and the person who

supplied the bass (whether he were Oswald or not) may have followed the melody in retaining the tonic harmony through the bar.

3. The place of the phrase in regard to the tonality of the piece is not at all obviously in keeping with the natural course of the harmonies; it is, as it were, "dragged in by the heels,"precisely as a composer in the present day would be apt to do in the case of a popular song to which he wished to make a musical allusion.

4. The words "God save the King" are associated with the phrase, and although they run on with the words "and Duke," and are not the opening words of any version, nine people out of ten would accept them as a quotation. If they really are a quotation the way they are introduced argues strongly in favour of the snatch being well-known to every one who heard or sang the round.

Against the theory that we have an intentional quotation from a well-known patriotic song that was popular in 1680, there is of course the objection that no other trace of the existence of the tune as "God save the King" can be found in musical or general literature. But the very same difficulty holds good as against the "John Bull" theory. We cannot suppose that the adaptation from Bull's virginal piece was made by Henry Carey without his claiming for himself any share in its production, and it is equally curious that a deliberate adaptation should be left unrecorded in a collection like Simpson's *Thesaurus Musicus*. Even if we accept the theory that Purcell put in these four notes to the four words deliberately as a quotation, we do not get much further on, though we obtain a far earlier date than any as yet fixed. For it is evident that many of the claims already mentioned, including the far-fetched one that it is an adaptation from one of Purcell's own sonatas, must fall to the ground. At the time of the publication of the sonatas, in 1683, the MS in which the round is written had been in Mr. Campelman's possession for two years at least; now, supposing the sonatas to have been circulated in manuscript among players of stringed instruments for some years before their publication, a fairly long time must needs elapse before a phrase embedded in such a work, and thence giving rise to a song, should be well enough known to warrant a quotation from it being made so as to be understood.

We are left, then, to choose between John Bull and the composer of the carol in *Melismata* as the author of the famous tune. Both these alternatives seem to me as difficult to accept as the theory that Purcell just put these four notes in by accident,

attaching them to the loyal words by the merest coincidence, and disturbing the natural flow of his catch in order to introduce them, though neither he nor any one else would be able to see any point in the musical phrase. I still hope for the discovery of some form of the tune dating from a sufficiently early time to justify Purcell in quoting from it. Personally, I like to fancy that the song got itself composed, as we say, during the period of the Commonwealth, when it would be obviously dangerous to write it down, and that it may have become so popular with the discredited Royalists that when the Restoration came, it was not held to be necessary to write it since it would be in every one's mouth. The most cogent objection to this suggestion is that the song would have had to change sides; it is unlikely, of course, that a Stuart song should have been adapted in 1745 to celebrate the quelling of the Stuart rising.

Where all theories are so difficult to establish there is perhaps some excuse for suggesting a new one.